

Connecticut Weekly AGRICULTURAL REPORT

Dannel P. Malloy, Governor
Steven K. Reviczky, Commissioner
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Connecticut Department of Agriculture
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Maple Lane Farms II co-owners Allyn Brown (L) and Brant Smith inspect a foam float holding heads of hydroponically-grown Bibb lettuce nearly ready for market.

HYDROPONIC FARMING GRADUALLY TAKING ROOT IN STATE

By Steve Jensen, Office of Commissioner Steven K. Reviczky

Tucked in the back corner of a Cheshire industrial park between a document-shredding company and an electric-switch maker, more than a million heads of hydroponically-grown Bibb lettuce will be cultivated and shipped over the next year.

Along busy Silver Lane in East Hartford, another hydroponic lettuce grower is readying for a major expansion that will employ cutting-edge technology he says is entirely new to Connecticut.

Agriscience students in Woodbury are using hydroponic techniques to grow hothouse tomatoes that stand taller than their heads.

And in New Haven, an experiment is about to begin that will test whether strawberries can be raised year-round indoors – and without soil.

Driven by an increasing demand for locally-grown food no matter what the season, these are some of the projects that illustrate the gradual emergence in Connecticut of what is technically known as controlled environment agriculture.

"People really want locally-grown produce in the winter but there's very little available," said Brant Smith, co-owner of Maple Lane Farms II in Cheshire. "We have not produced a head of lettuce here since we started that we threw away."

With more than 60,000 square feet of greenhouses, Maple Lane is the largest hydroponic producer in the state. The company was launched three years ago when Smith decided to move on from the annual flowers and plants he grew in soil there for about a decade.

Through a mutual friend, he learned that Preston farmer Allyn Brown was looking to expand his small hydroponic lettuce operation, and a partnership was formed.

Brown had turned to growing hydroponic lettuce in 2010 after the shutdown of the nearby Franklin Mushroom Farm, to which he had supplied specialty indoor-grown oyster mushrooms for nearly 25 years.

The expansion in Cheshire was partly funded by grants awarded by the Department of Agriculture. Their product – branded as "Living Lettuce" because the root ball remains attached to the head in the package and greatly increases shelf life – can be found in Stop & Shop and other retailers large and small across the state.

Maple Lane has doubled both their production space, known as ponds, and their business each year. That has been accomplish-

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PA LIVESTOCK SUMMARY

Avg. Dressing

SLAUGHTER COWS:

breakers 75-80% lean	103.50	108.50
boners 80-85% lean	103.00	107.25
lean 85-90% lean	96.50	102.50

CALVES graded bull

No 1 95-120lbs	373.75	428.25
No 1 80-90lbs	399.00	434.00
No 2 95-120lbs	352.00	394.25
No 2 80-90lbs	410.75	435.75
No 3 80-120lbs	302.50	372.50

SLAUGHTER STEERS

HiCh/Prm2-3	162.50	165.50
Ch1-3	157.50	160.75
Sel1-2	155.25	159.75

SLAUGHTER HOLSTEINS

HiCh/Prm2-3	146.00	149.25
Ch2-3	139.25	143.00
Sel1-2	134.25	140.00

SLAUGHTER HEIFERS

HiCh/Prm2-3	161.25	165.25
Ch1-3	155.75	159.00
Sel1-2	150.50	154.25

VEALERS Utility 60-120lb

	135.00	184.25
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SLAUGHTER LAMBS: Non-Traditional Markets:

ch/pr 2-3		
40-70 lbs	290.00	315.00
70-130 lbs	176.00	290.00

SLAUGHTER EWES: 2-3

120-160 lbs Good	92.00	107.00
160-300 lbs Good	70.00	78.00

BUCKS

120-200 lbs	70.00	130.00
200-300 lbs	68.00	102.00

SLAUGHTER GOATS: Sel.1, by head, est.

40-80 lbs	152.00	215.00
80-140 lbs	255.00	295.00

Nannies/Does: 80-130 lbs	250.00	272.00
130-180 lbs	220.00	255.00

Bucks/Billies: 80-150 lbs	225.00	262.00
150-250 lbs	230.00	320.00

NEW HOLLAND, PA. HOG AUCTION

Sold by actual weights; prices quoted by hundred wt.

48-52	250-350 lbs	44.00	48.50
52-56	250-300 lbs	51.00	54.00
Sows, US1-3	400-500 lbs	36.00	42.50
Boars	200-300 lbs	30.00	31.00

WHOLESALE FRUITS & VEGETABLES**NEW ENGLAND GROWN****Boston Terminal and Wholesale Grower Prices**

	LOW	HIGH
ALFALFA SPROUTS, 5LB	14.00	14.00
APPLE, MACS, 120, USFCY	18.00	18.00
BEAN SPROUTS, 10LB	7.00	7.00
CIDER, APPLE 4-1 GAL	24.00	24.00
PARSNIPS, 25LB	24.00	24.00
SQUASH, BTTRNT, 1-1/9 BU	12.00	13.00
TOMATOES, 25LB, GRHSE, VR	24.00	25.00
TOMS, CHRRY, GHS, 8/10 OZ	23.00	24.00

SHIPPED IN

APPLE, RED DEL, NY, 88, USXFCY	24.00	24.00
APPLE, GALA, PA, 88, USXFCY	30.00	30.00
ASPARAGUS, CA, 11LB	35.00	35.00
BEANS, GREEN, FL, BU, MCHPK	26.00	27.00
BEETS, RED, TX, 12	16.00	18.00
CARROTS, CA, 16/3LB	20.00	22.00
CORN, BICOLOR, FL, 4DZ	17.00	17.00
DANDELION, GA, 1-3/5BU, 12	18.00	18.00
EGGPLANT, FL, 1-1/9BU	14.00	16.00
KALE, GA, 12/CTN	18.00	20.00
LETTUCE, ROMAINE, TX, 24	24.00	25.00
ORANGES, NAVEL, CA, 88	20.00	21.00
PEAR, D'ANJOU, WA, US#1, 120	28.00	29.00
PEPPERS, GRN, FL, LG, 1-1/9BU	10.00	11.00
STRAWBERRIES, 8-1LB, FL	16.00	16.00
SWEET POTATOES, LA, 40LB	28.00	30.00
SWISS CHARD, TX, 12/CTN	18.00	20.00

HAY**LANCASTER, PA/PRICE PER TON**

	PREMIUM	GOOD
ALFALFA	240.00-355.00	210.00-240.00
MIXED HAY	260.00-410.00	225.00-265.00
TIMOTHY	230.00-375.00	230.00-290.00
STRAW	165.00-230.00	

**NORTHEAST/USDA WEEKLY
RETAIL LAMB**

SHLD ROAST	7.99	7.99
SHLDR BLD CHOP	4.99	7.49
SHLDR RND BN CHOP	7.39	7.49
RIBS	10.99	10.99
LOIN CHOPS	7.99	13.99
LEG BNIN	5.99	5.99
BNLS LEG	6.99	6.99
SHANK	6.99	6.99
STEW MEAT	5.49	8.99

**EASTER PLANTS
CT GROWN/WHOLESALE**

EASTER LILY, 6"	4.75
TULIPS, 6"	3.25
DAFFODILS, 6"	3.25
TULIPS, 10"	10.50

**MIDDLESEX LIVESTOCK AUCTION
Middlefield, CT., March 16, 2015**

Bob Calves:	LOW	HIGH
45-60 lbs.	65.00	75.00
61-75 lbs.	100.00	120.00
76-90 lbs.	270.00	290.00
91-105 lbs.	300.00	320.00
106 lbs. & up	340.00	350.00
Farm Calves	360.00	370.00
Starter Calves	55.00	60.00
Veal Calves	130.00	180.00
Open Heifers	105.00	145.00
Beef Heifers	136.00	145.00
Feeder Steers	155.00	162.50
Beef Steers	130.00	143.00
Stock Bulls	135.00	182.50
Beef Bulls	134.00	145.00
Replacement Cows	n/a	n/a
Replacement Heifers	n/a	n/a
Boars	1 @	.03
Sows	12.50	15.00
Butcher Hogs	n/a	n/a
Feeder Pigs	2 @	100.00 each
Sheep	100.00	150.00
Lambs	140.00	240.00
Goats each	100.00	360.00
Kid Goats	70.00	180.00
Canners	up to	105.00
Cutters	10.00	109.00
Utility Grade Cows	110.00	115.00
Rabbits each	9.00	30.00
Chickens each	8.00	22.50
Ducks each	10.00	14.00

NORTHEAST EGG PRICES USDA

Per doz. Grade A and Grade A white in cartons to retailers (volume buyers)

XTRA LARGE	1.60	1.81
LARGE	1.54	1.68
MEDIUM	1.20	1.33

NEW ENGLAND SHELL EGGS

Per doz. Grade A brown in carton delivered store door. (Range)

XTRA LARGE	2.07	2.17
LARGE	2.03	2.13
MEDIUM	1.52	1.62

PA FEEDER PIG SUMMARY

US # 1-2 30-40 lb	100.00	135.00
40-50 lb	130.00	130.00
US # 2-3 30-40 lb	80.00	200.00
40-50 lb	95.00	115.00
50-60 lb	105.00	120.00

FOR SALE

1-R. Blumenthal & Donahue is now Connecticut's first independent NATIONWIDE Agri-Business Insurance Agency. Christmas tree growers, beekeepers, sheep breeders, organic farmers and all others, call us for all your insurance needs. 800-554-8049 or www.bludon.com.

2-R. Farm, homeowner and commercial insurance—we do it all. Call Blumenthal & Donahue 800-554-8049 or www.bludon.com.

3-R. Gallagher electric fencing for farms, horses, deer control, gardens, & beehives. Sonpal's Power Fence 860-491-2290.

4-R. Packaging for egg sales. New egg cartons, flats, egg cases, 30 doz and 15 doz. Polinsky Farm 860-376-2227.

5-R. Nationwide Agribusiness Insurance Program, endorsed by the CT Farm Bureau, save up to 23% on your farm insurance and get better protection. References available from satisfied farmers. Call Marci today at 203-444-6553.

8-R. CT non-GMO grain and corn. Hay and straw. Pleasant View Farms. Louis. 860-803-0675.

19-R. 1988 International Model 1954, 22 foot body, excellent condition. New tires. \$12,000.00. Call Al 203-223-4853.

MISCELLANEOUS

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21-R. NYC Farmers' Market Salesperson and Van Driver – Excellent driver with strong personal skills to deliver and sell cheese at NYC farmers' markets. 18 hour day, 2 Saturdays/month, \$14/hour. www.catocornerfarm.com for info.

22-R. Van Delivery Driver – Deliver cheese to/from NYC farmers' markets. Two Saturdays/month. www.catocornerfarm.com for info.

**RESCHEDULED SENIOR FARMERS' MARKET
NUTRITION PROGRAM RE-CERTIFICATION
MEETINGS**

- March 25, 10a.m.; Middlesex County Extension Center, 1066 Saybrook Rd. (Rt. 154), Haddam
- March 31, 10a.m.; Kellogg Environmental Center, 500 Hawthorne Ave., Derby, CT

Food Stamp/SNAP EBT Farmers' Market sign-up opportunity also available for farmers wishing to do so.

Questions may be directed to: richard.macsuga@ct.gov or 860-713-2544

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—ed by fine-tuning growing methods, such as customizing nutrient levels in the water and installing carbon-dioxide generators to accelerate plant growth.

Each head of lettuce typically takes about 30 days to mature from seeds germinated under lights in a cube of peat moss and transplanted to a foam “float” that allows the roots to suspend freely in the 60-degree water.

“In some ways, this is more like running a factory than farming because it’s a non-stop cycle,” Brown said. “But we still have to sow the seed and transplant. It’s just growing in a different medium.”

Establishing quicker turnaround time and maintaining a consistent high output is key to keeping major customers like Stop & Shop supplied.

“They don’t want to hear that you don’t have product in the middle of winter,” Brown said.

Also vital to their success is the work they have done to market their product, which they describe as a tastier, better-textured and more nutritious alternative to iceberg lettuce.

“We pack a bigger head and it goes to the market fresh and stays fresh for two weeks,” said Smith. “We’re developing a brand, and at this point people are looking for our product.”

Steve Weinstein’s Connecticut Hydroponic Farm in East Hartford is also in its third season. Although he now produces only a fraction of the Bibb lettuce grown at Maple Lane, Weinstein said business has been steady and “everything we can grow we can sell.”

Weinstein – who received a Dept. of Agriculture grant to help him rebuild greenhouses damaged in the blizzard of February 2013 – said he expects to make an announcement soon on a major expansion of his operation.

Sarah LaRose, an Agriculture Education Instructor at the Ellis Clark Regional Agriscience & Technology Program at Nonnewaug High School in Woodbury, teaches hydroponics as part of her local food-production class.

She said she has spoken to many growers interested in pursuing hydroponic farming, but also cautious about diving into the technology and concerned about the method being cost-effective – especially when it comes to energy costs.

“The quality of the product is second to none, and once you understand what you’re doing, it’s a fairly simple system,” LaRose said. “But there may need to be more grower education on how to do this in a cost-effective way.”

Reducing energy costs through the use of fuel-cell technology is part of an experiment soon to get underway in New Haven that will test the feasibility of hydroponically growing berries and other fruits that are now only can be grown in a very short outdoor season.

Agrivolution LLC, owned by Richard Fu, received a USDA Specialty Crop Block Grant administered by the state agriculture department to research whether hydroponic techniques used in other countries can work in Connecticut.

“Hydroponic and other types of indoor farming are becoming increasingly effective alternatives to traditional growing methods in many parts of the world,” said agriculture Commissioner Steven K. Revczky, who last year toured several enormous such facilities in Quebec Province, Canada. “Connecticut has a well-established greenhouse industry that I believe could make the transition to growing food 12 months a year, and the customer base to support it.”

Brown said Connecticut and the rest of the country may be slowly warming to the method.

“Developing any form of agriculture is an ongoing process,” he said. “It’s taken us three years to get there but we’re pretty zeroed in now. It’s been a heck of a learning curve.”



Left: A worker at Maple Lane Farms II places a float of lettuce seedlings in a growing pond.

Below: Two heads ready for market. Leaving the root ball intact in the package (L) keeps the lettuce fresh for up to two weeks.

Below bottom: Students from the Ellis Clark Regional Agriscience & Technology Program at Nonnewaug High School in Woodbury with some of the hydroponic tomatoes growing in the school's greenhouse.

Below left : A carbon-dioxide generator designed to accelerate crop growth hangs in a greenhouse at Maple Lane Farms II.



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